



## Highland Senior Citizens Network

*Nothing about us without us*

Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) SCO34260

December 2023

### Chair's Introduction

The Community Partnership Conference hosted by the Highland Hospice, Connecting Carers and the Highland Third Sector Interface held on 8<sup>th</sup> November at WASPS Inverness Creative Academy was probably the largest gathering of organisations and individuals involved in Community Support that I have taken part in.

There were well over one hundred representatives from a galaxy of organisations from across all sectors. The organisers have to be congratulated on the seamless running of the event which captured the aspirations of those who attended.

The hoped for outcome of the Conference is to increase and maintain partnership working to deliver meaningful, measurable services that make an impact on the lives of those needing community support. The potential impact of our community services across the Highlands is huge.

It is an endless mantra to ask the Third Sector to evaluate what it achieves. As one of the keynote speakers stated, the best evaluation of the Third Sector is to evaluate what would happen were it not there. The pressure on all sectors has never been greater, as is the need for all sectors to work together. **Ian McNamara**



**Warm wishes from everyone at Highland Senior Citizens Network for the festive season!**

**We will be closing for the festive period on Friday 22nd December and reopening on Monday 8th Jan 2024.**



### Staying in touch with HSCN

#### Phone or e-mail our Co-ordinators:

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**call** HSCN phone: 07716 884 989

**write** to Box 301, Mailboxes, 8 Church Street, Inverness IV1 1EA

**visit** our website [www.hscn.co.uk](http://www.hscn.co.uk)

Jo Cowan 07933 653585

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**e-mail** on [hscn@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:hscn@hotmail.co.uk)

**follow us** on Twitter and Facebook

## What has HSCN been up to?

**This year's HSCN Annual Conference and AGM** took place in September, focusing on 'Things we need to keep talking about'. Thought-provoking speakers had us thinking about important topics including mental health, dementia, and scams.

Graham Morgan, Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland and writer and speaker about all things mental health related kept our attention even when joining virtually due to Covid. Some highlights from his talk 'Our mental health':

*I am quite proud of her (my mum's) stubborn insistence on staying in her house. She has many friends where she lives; most within walking distance. She does voluntary work, gardens, walks everywhere and still swims in the sea at 86 which is more than I do. She has lived in that house for maybe forty years. It is where she belongs, where her community is, where she is connected; where she knows everyone. For me, key to our mental health is to feel a sense of belonging, and maybe she would find that with one of us, but I worry that a new strange community, with the need to make new friends at the same time as becoming less mobile, might instead of being a lovely thing to do, be a place of dislocation and isolation despite our best intentions. Witnessing my parents' lives, I have become aware of and alarmed at how difficult it can be for some people as they age. My mum is more stoical and I think happier than me but I am so used to hearing that one of her friends has died or another is now in a nursing home or another can no longer get out of the house or is in hospital. To me, from the outside, it sounds like a place where we may suffer more than people realise. Losing people dear to us can be awful and I cannot imagine what it is like to constantly have to mourn those we have loved.*

*We sometimes stereotype different communities and it is rarely a good thing that we do that but the more I see of people from an older generation the more impressed I am. I like the positivity and the fortitude in their refusal to complain about sometimes awful situations. It may be something that spites our own self, but when my dad came out of hospital the last time, I was impressed that he refused his stroller, insisted on having a drink even if he shouldn't, insisted on being him even though being him was often unhealthy. I liked that thrown insistence on his own sense of dignity and his right not to be sensible at all.*

*It is so patronising of me to say this to you when I think of the purpose of your organisation but I think that the older we get the more invisible we can get and the more isolated and lonely we can get. When we combine this with the pressure being older sometimes has on people's minds and bodies, I can see how there is a need to speak up and point out that many of the issues you face are fundamental human rights issues – that everyone deserves to be treated with dignity and that dignity includes connection and belonging and community and the help we should all offer each other as a matter of course, even when we hesitate to ask for it.*

*I do not know if this applies to many of you, but I don't like to feel needy or demanding. I don't like to ask for help and often doubt I really need it. Luckily for me, on many occasions, people have not only reassured me that I can get help but have told me that I have a right to it and will likely benefit from it and that has been incredibly helpful.*

*Whilst I said earlier that belonging and connection are important for mental health; I think just as important is kindness and love and sometimes forgiveness; not only from those we love but those we routinely encounter in our lives. I think that is especially important when we seek help for the intensely personal. It can be hugely frightening and delicate and embarrassing and when we reach out anxiously for help and when we are met with warmth and a healthy type of love as well as an understanding of what might help us, that can make all the difference. My personal ambition is for this to be the norm; for everyone who gives us help to treat us with warmth and kindness without ever questioning why they do that, it is just what you do with your fellow humans.*

Graham's speech can be found at: <https://www.grahammorgan-author.com/post/our-mental-health> Or contact Anne for a copy.

In the conversation that followed people discussed where to get support mentioning; GP, Change Mental Health and their GP Link Workers, Highland Hospice course for those recently bereaved, UHI cooking for the bereaved course, Befrienders Highland, Men's Shed – a place for men to speak to each other, and Dementia Friends Training. Suitable care packages are needed as currently people often follow a predictable route of having a fall, going into the hospital and then moving into a care home. Suitable care can change the inevitability of this.

**HSCN Trustees Joan Philip and Robert Kay talked about the peer Scams Conversations they have been having with groups across Highland.** Participants gave examples of scams they had been targeted by:

- Texts – 'hello dear, I have an offer of employment...'
- Requests to buy Amazon vouchers
- TV license demand asking for bank details
- Buying a garden pond – lost £1500 due to fraud by a small company
- Identity theft – AA membership taken out in your name and address

They also shared suggestions to stay safe:

- Always pay with a Credit Card
- If it sounds too good to be true, it is
- Phone blocker to reduce nuisance calls. True Call system
- Banks now proactively asking people why they are withdrawing large sums of money or making unusual payments
- Email address check – use website Have I Been Pwned to check your email:  
<https://haveibeenpwned.com>

**Conversation Café: Making everyone welcome** Following inspiring discussions at Inverness Pride we continued the conversation with Round Table discussion about how HSCN can make everyone feel welcome and included.

### Connecting with those who struggle to be involved...



#### **I feel welcome when:** *I come to HSCN for the first time*

- People smile: *When someone smiles and is welcoming. People smile and say hello. Someone shakes my hand with a smile. I get a welcoming smile*
- People listen: *I am being listened to. My voice is heard*
- People talk: *Someone says 'hello'. I'm welcomed by name. Introduced to others with a little background "...from HSCN". A stranger introduces themselves to me and allows me to introduce myself. Someone speaks to you and shows interest in what is special to you. When they show they are interested in me / my life*
- We meet: *We can meet face to face. Try to include other people*
- I can hear: *People ask me what would help me to hear them*
- Clear info: *There is a clear explanation of what's going on. A map of the hotel.*
- *When issues I care about are on the agenda*
- *My environment is comfortable – correct temp, comfy seat...*
- *I am shown an equality of respect*
- *When my area is included*

#### **What can I do to make people feel welcome in my community:**

- **Spread information / leaflets far and wide.** *Keep leaflets and info at my clinic*  
*More information to distribute locally. Send out to Community Council to copy out to put them up on notice boards and shops (local), GPs surgeries, Local firms*
- **Word of mouth:** *Have HSCN co-ordinators speak to my network groups. Talk up HSCN to my neighbours (in sheltered housing). Bring a friend or neighbour with me to an online or F2F event for HSCN. Spread the word. Involve friendly neighbours – make connections. Offer to take a person to our lunch club and to*

help them to feel included in our community. The opportunities to refer to HSCN as they arise socially or in groups. Would need a brief descriptive sentence to explain what it's about!

- Community council to make sure needs of older people are being taken on board
- Suggest an article in the local newsletter. Some people may not be aware of HSCN and what they do
- Find out what sort of activities members would like to get involved in

### What can HSCN do to connect with ALL older people?

- Change grumpy owl logo to happy owl
- **Connecting with other community groups** such as food projects and food banks, warm hubs and day centres
- **Individual support:** Chum people to meetings, Think about moral support for carers. Buddy Persons. Individual interactions with people with dementia
- **Group support / Activities:** Intergenerational Cafes – reaching out to young and old – particularly teenage groups
- **Publicity:** High profile publicity for issues. Contact Julien Dempster who writes Inverness Courier 'Christian Article'. Calendar of events. Advertise in press
- **Info sharing:** HSCN members spreading the word – word of mouth, Increase awareness through: local shops, GP hubs, Library, Community Centres, Community Council to put out info, Information of network available at senior exercise groups, post out fliers with what HSCN is about with a mention of other organisations and groups on it – for people not on social media. Have a landline number to contact, check that your local library has print copy (ies) of the magazine, distributing info leaflets – GP surgery, churches, libraries, shops, Post Offices, NHS, Social Services distributing news-sheet
- **Physical accessibility** – links to public transport, Local meetings, Raise consistent support for health care, use effective technologies to support involvement

We are looking forward to taking action on many of the suggestions made in 2024.



### 10 Festive Food Anagrams

e.g. key rut (6) \_\_\_\_\_ turkey her first rely (6,6) \_\_\_\_\_ sherry  
trifle

1. anger bridge (11) \_\_\_\_\_
2. arab curry scene (9,5) \_\_\_\_\_
3. unready cabs (6,5) \_\_\_\_\_
4. dispatching drums (9,7) \_\_\_\_\_
5. best pal sinking (4,2,8) \_\_\_\_\_
6. spice mine (5,4) \_\_\_\_\_
7. ten nice elms (11) \_\_\_\_\_
8. ugly leo (4,3) \_\_\_\_\_
9. same old monks (6,6) \_\_\_\_\_
10. toast a sore pot (5,8) \_\_\_\_\_

**HSCN Tea-breaks 2023** We continue to meet on a Thursday morning at 11am for the weekly HSCN virtual Tea-breaks on Zoom. Many have been attending since we started in January 2021 and it's always lovely to see new faces whether for a particular topic or more regular attendance. People are currently joining from Caithness, Skye, Mid Ross, Easter Ross, Sutherland, Inverness and Lochaber.

We are coming up for our 150<sup>th</sup> Tea-break. Here is an A to Z of some of this year's Tea-break topics to give you a taste of the variety of our conversations:

**A**ge Scotland 80 /Air ambulance consultation /Age Friendly Communities, SOPA

**B**ank closures, post office closures, Railway station closures...

**C**ommunity Engagement, Highland Hospice / Covid, Highland Memory Space

**D**igital exclusion, Digital Engagement Audit Scotland / Demystifying Death week

**E**lder abuse, Hourglass Scotland

**F**ilm making for older people, Eden Court Re-awakening Creativity

**G**enerating Older Active Lives Digitally, (GOALD)

**H**ealthcare consultation, University of the Highlands and Islands

**I**ntergenerational guide for older people, Generations Working Together

**J**ust a Tea-break – for many attendees their favourite

**K**ee laughing – especially with our Music and Movement session

**L**uminate Focus Group on Creativity

**M**indfulness, Kate Boyd / MySelf Management

**N**orma's house move – how not to design an accessible house

**O**nline collaborative art with Inverness OpenArts

**P**lay – to feed into Care and Learning Alliance (CALA) review

**Q**uality Questionnaire, Care Inspectorate

**R**ape and Sexual Abuse Service Highland / Realistic Medicine, NHS Highland

**S**cams, Police Scotland / Fire Safety, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

**T**ransport developments in Inverness, Highland Council

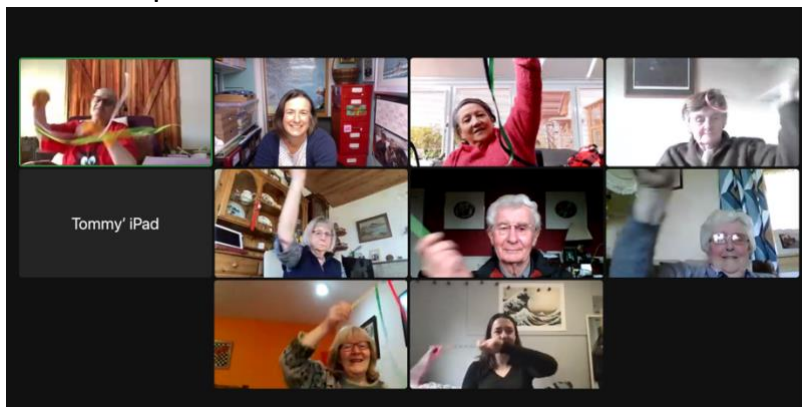
**U**sually we have an invited guest but sometimes it's just a chance to catch up

**V**ictim Support

**W**eather near you – we often start with an update from attendees

**a**n **eX**traordinary **Y**ear on **Z**oom

Great to see how many consultations we have been able to contribute to and influence in this way. Tea-breaks start back at 11am on the 11<sup>th</sup> January 2024. Let Anne know if you would like the Zoom link.



**Co-ordinators News:** November saw the co-ordinators out and about in Highland, getting creative and eating cake. It's a tricky job but someone has to do it!

**UHI / NHS Rural Health consultation with Inverness OpenArts** took place both in person at UHI campus and at a Tea-break in November. Both were intergenerational sessions. Looking forward to the next events in the Spring.



## RURAL HEALTH PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

UHI and Science Ceilidh invite you to share your experiences and memories of rural healthcare in the 75th anniversary year of the NHS.

Help us construct a vision for future rural health and care services through a series of creative activities, using archive materials, photography, stories and more!

This is the first in a series of artist-supported events that will culminate in a community ceilidh in 2024!

Tea and coffee on arrival and a bowl of soup before you leave!



Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> November, 11am.  
In person. Room 109/112,  
UHI Inverness. Contact  
[mari.todd@uhi.ac.uk](mailto:mari.todd@uhi.ac.uk)



Thursday 30<sup>th</sup>, Online Session.  
Contact: Anne McDonald, Co-ordinator,  
Highland Senior Citizens Network  
07933 653313  
[anne-hscn@outlook.com](mailto:anne-hscn@outlook.com)



## Creativity in Care's Windows of Reality show, Eden Court



Creativity in Care's Windows of Reality event featured live performance, film and stories. People from communities across Highland made their own puppets and other art, and worked together to prepare puppet shows that movingly shared their stories and experiences during the coronavirus pandemic.

These puppets were designed by many of the participants of the Truacanta

Project in Cromarty, who carried on their involvement with Creativity in Care.

**Art in Nature Project launch at Abriachan Forest** Such a lovely day at the launch of the new HTSI 'Arts in Nature' project. Great to learn more about the project and take part in some nature based creative activities in the woods.



**Avoch Primary School intergenerational focus** Delighted to meet with a group of around 20 pupils, aged 4 to 12, from Avoch Primary School. The pupils are really interested in meeting with older people in the community, so Anne and Jenye from Black Isle Cares visited to talk about how they can make people feel welcome when they come into the school. The pupils had lots of good ideas and are really looking forward to hosting a Tea-party for older people in the community in the spring. In the photo they are drawing a picture of what they think a typical 'older person' looks like.



### First Scottish Dementia Arts Festival



#### The Pearls of Wisdom Tea Set

The fragile tea set embodies the idea of 'Pearls of Wisdom' – what advice were we given, what advice would we give to others and how might we advise our younger selves?

Many of our conversations revolved around ideas of fragility and resilience. Coming out of the experience of the pandemic and into the impact of war, climate catastrophe and the cost-of-living crisis, there has been a collective sense of valuing the ordinary, noticing beauty, sensing our vulnerability and the vulnerability of others, recognising the need to protect the natural world and the planet. The tissue cups, saucers, plates and place mats contain our pearls of wisdom and celebrate the weekly community we make round our creative table each week.

Anne and Jo called in to the first ever Scottish Dementia Arts Festival at Eden Court Theatre and caught up with some of our bold (Bringing out Leaders in Dementia) friends. Planned and facilitated by people with dementia and their carers, it was inspiring and exciting to see all the creativity involved. There were so many different art forms; music, drama, dance, clowning, writing, sculpture...It will be back again next year and we recommend you try to get along in 2024.

## Skye & Lochalsh Older People's Groups Get-together

Along with **Age Scotland** and **Skye Older People's Welfare**, **Highland Senior Citizens Network** co-hosted a successful Older People's Groups Get-Together for Skye & Lochalsh on Friday 24th November in Skye Camanachd Social Club in Portree. It was a joint celebration - of groups reconnecting, significant anniversaries present and future, and of cake!



It was good to see so many groups represented - Dunvegan Lunch Club and Shopping Bus, Skye Stroke Friends, Staffin Lunch Club, Raasay Community Kitchen and Alzheimer Scotland.

We also welcomed Holly, a PhD Researcher from St Vincent and the Grenadines.

Participants were interested to hear about Scams from Joan, our Highland Senior Citizens Network Trustee and Peer-Speaker, and learn about Bogus Callers/Trades-people from PC Paige Macdonald of Police Scotland Highlands & Islands Preventions and Interventions Team. People also appreciated the useful literature they could take back to their group members.



It was fabulous having the chance to meet together again, share our news and enjoy a lovely afternoon tea. ❤️

**If you would like to co-host a Get-together to bring together the older people's groups in your area, please get in touch with Anne and Jo, our Highland Senior Citizens Network Co-ordinators.**

## Great Wilderness Challenge fundraising

Delighted to receive £4750 from the wonderful Great Wilderness Challenge. It's always so good to participate and then lovely when it's so



successful for us in fundraising. Among other things, this funding will mean we can continue to post out copies of the news-sheet, despite the increasing costs of postage. On the right are 5 of the 9 HSCN walkers after the walk and having enjoyed the delicious soup and other treats. On the left is our 4-legged walker, who was much speedier than the rest of us!



## Scottish Older People's Assembly, 9<sup>th</sup> October, Glasgow

Jo and Anne attended the Scottish Older People's Assembly (SOPA) in Glasgow and raised a question on behalf of the HSCN Trustees about accessible sources of stable, longer-term core funding for community groups and charities:

*With ever growing reliance on national and local charity organisations and community groups to provide support for older people within our communities, how do you think the Scottish Government should best provide accessible sources of stable, longer-term core funding for these vital organisations in these difficult times?*

The people on the panel for the Q & A were Jeremy Balfour, Scottish Conservative MSP, Daniel O'Malley, spokesman for the Scottish Liberal Democrats, Colin Smyth, Scottish Labour MSP, and Michelle Thomson, Scottish National Party MSP. They both understood the issue and agreed they were willing to support efforts to create fair funding.

SCVO are currently leading a campaign on behalf of the Third Sector on the issue of Fair Funding <https://scvo.scot/p/56732/2023/01/16/%e2%80%8bfair-funding-for-the-voluntary-sector>. Following the event, Robin Woodburn, a SOPA trustee who was chairing the session, wrote to the four politicians asking them to "throw your personal weight behind the fair-funding proposals".

A couple of them have responded already, agreeing with the request. We will keep you updated on progress.



## Services

### Citizens Advice Bureau, Energy Support and Advice



#### **Energy Support and Advice – presentations for vulnerable and low-income customers**

Inverness Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau has been funded to offer free presentations to vulnerable and low-income clients, customers and consumers about how to save energy in the home.

Our 'Energy Support and Advice' sessions cover the following:

- Schemes available to help people with their energy costs and needs including eligibility for payments such as Warm Home Discount, Winter Fuel Payment plus other grants and entitlements
- Energy efficiency measures
- Priority Services Register
- Smart meters
- What the CAB Energy Best Deal Team can provide for clients.

Our sessions are flexible, allow for questions and last between 30-60 minutes.

We deliver our sessions to groups of 8-10 people and in person or online, depending on circumstances and location.

All Citizens Advice Bureau services are offered at 'no cost' to the recipient.

If you are interested in receiving a presentation, please let me know by email at [Mike.Youatt@invernesscab.org](mailto:Mike.Youatt@invernesscab.org) or by phone on **01463 237664**.

Can I suggest that, if any members come across any gaps in provision, they let us here in Inverness know – we will then endeavour to resolve the issue and ensure that everybody who wishes to receive a presentation is successful.

**Mike Youatt, GSS Training & Engagement Officer, Inverness Badenoch and Strathspey Citizens Advice Bureau, 29 Union Street , Inverness , IV1 1QA**

**Mikeysline** is a local mental health and suicide prevention charity. Our accessible services include a textline service, open Sun - Thurs 6pm - 10pm and Fri - Sat 7pm - 7am. Telephone appointments and online 1:1 appointments can be booked via our website and available every evening 6pm - 10pm. [www.mikeysline.co.uk](http://www.mikeysline.co.uk)

**Mikeysline is there for all ages.** Anyone can phone the office number within office hours to book an appointment for a Mikeysline support worker to call back (on landline or mobile) at an agreed time. **01463 729000**



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## HI Scot Credit Union

HI-Scot has been in existence since 2006, though up until 2010 was under the name of Western Isles Credit Union. The name was changed to HI-Scot to reflect that fact that we'd moved to a position of serving all of the Highlands & Islands, and indeed anyone who lives or works in this area can apply to join us.

Like all Credit Unions, HI-Scot is run for the benefit of its members only and therefore we have no external shareholders. However, even within the high customer service standards most Credit Unions achieve, we believe we stand out as exceptional and this is one of the reasons we say that HI-Scot is a Credit Union for YOU. You'll find us friendly, efficient, helpful and decent to deal with, and because Credit Unions operate purely for the benefit of their members, then, and unlike some other financial institutions such as banks, we don't try to sell you financial products and services you don't necessarily need or possibly can't afford. What we will do is help and advise you in any way we can, and a key aspect of this is ensuring that our members do not take on a level of unmanageable debt.

### **HI-Scot Credit Union, a base in Stornoway but easily accessible to anyone in the Highlands & Islands**

Our base is in Stornoway on the Isle of Lewis, but we're able to serve all of the Highlands and Islands because of our network of Access Points. These include Highland Council Service Points and a number of housing association offices, all of which have the facilities to provide and take application forms and verify personal ID etc.

We also offer online membership and, once you have joined, you can access your Credit Union account at any time to view your balances, arrange transfers or download statements.

As a member, savings can be paid in by standing order, payroll deduction or via payment card at any Post Office or PayPoint outlet - please contact us if you wish to order a payment card - and application forms for loans and other services are all available on this website.

### Contact Details

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**Tel:** 01851 701865

**Fax:** 01851 701542

**Address:** HI-Scot Credit Union, 7 James Street, Stornoway, Isle of Lewis, HS1 2QN

**E-mail:** [info@hi-scot.com](mailto:info@hi-scot.com)

**Web:** [www.hi-scot.com](http://www.hi-scot.com)

## What's on

**The Bugt Stop Cosy Café** will be re-opening on Monday 6<sup>th</sup> November for a sandwich lunch, warmth and company – you can sit-in for lunch or take it home. Open every Monday, 1pm – 2.30pm. All welcome. There is no charge although small donations towards costs are always welcome! The Bugt Stop is in Torvean Avenue, Inverness (beside the shop and behind the Bugt Park stadium).



**FREE, NO BOOKING REQUIRED**

**Art-for-Wellbeing Sessions**

Open to people of all abilities and backgrounds aged 16+ with a particular focus on increasing access to artmaking for those who face barriers to participation in the arts. For example, due to social/ financial circumstances or mental & physical health.

**All sessions are now drop-in, no booking required! Just turn up on the day, arrive and leave whenever suits within the session time.**



**Openarts Sessions Focus on:**

- **Removing** social & financial barriers to creative opportunities
- **Supporting** wellbeing through artmaking in a shared, non-judgemental environment
- **Providing** safe, creative spaces for people of all backgrounds and abilities
- **Developing** artistic confidence and skills at a pace that suits the individual
- **Nurturing** participants' own interests through access to a wide range of art materials

**Session Schedule: Oct – Dec 2023**



Venue	Date	Time	Artist Facilitators	Activities
The Spectrum Centre	Thurs 14 <sup>th</sup> Dec	2pm – 4.30pm	Izzy & Cecilia	Free Choice
The Inverness Creative Academy	Tues 19 <sup>th</sup> Dec	10am – 3pm	Izzy & Evija	Miniature Painting & Free Choice

Questions? Queries? Feedback? Contact Project Coordinator, Bonnie: -  
**text/call:** 07539020698    **email:** [invernessopenarts@waspsstudios.org.uk](mailto:invernessopenarts@waspsstudios.org.uk)

Christmas Anagram Answers – (no peeking until you've completed it)

1. gingerbread   2. cranberry sauce   3. brandy sauce   4. christmas pudding
5. pigs in blankets   6. mince pies   7. clementines   8. yule log
9. smoked salmon   10. roast potatoes



## **Online Dementia Friends Sessions November and December 2023**

I would like to make you aware of further opportunities to learn more about dementia. Please make friends, family and colleagues aware of these dates also - they are open to anyone with an interest in dementia.

**Dementia Friends** - *Dementia Friends Scotland* is an Alzheimer Scotland initiative to raise awareness of dementia and reduce stigma. With the right support and understanding, people can live well with dementia and contribute to their local community. By taking part in *Dementia Friends Scotland*, you can learn a little about what it's like to live with dementia and turn that understanding into action:

<https://www.alzscot.org/our-work/dementia-friendly-communities/dementia-friends-scotland>

**Booking:** contact Kenny Wright to book a place - [Kwright@alzscot.org](mailto:Kwright@alzscot.org)  
07788286254

### **Location:**

- **Online** via Microsoft Teams.

**Consultations** **Pension Age Winter Heating Payment** - Views are being sought on the introduction of a new benefit to replace the UK Government's Winter Fuel Payment in Scotland. The Scottish Government has previously committed to delivering the new payment on a like-for-like basis with the existing benefit. It will help more than a million pensioners with heating costs in the winter.

The [consultation document](#) sets out proposals for implementing the new payment when it is introduced from the winter of 2024 and asks for responses, which can be submitted until 15 January. The public's views on issues such as who should be eligible, the timing and format of the payment and the likely impact of the benefit, are being sought – as well as further evidence about issues specific to people who are off the gas grid.

Social justice secretary Shirley-Anne Somerville said: "Pension Age Winter Heating Payment will seek to safely and securely transfer responsibility for the delivery of Winter Fuel Payment to the Scottish Government, ensuring that more than a million pensioners currently eligible for Winter Fuel Payment continue to receive this support. We are now looking for the public's views, as well as those of relevant experts and organisations – through this consultation – to finalise our policy on this important benefit."

### Information Sheet

#### What is the Scottish COVID-19 Inquiry?

The Scottish COVID-19 Inquiry is investigating the devolved strategic response to the pandemic in Scotland between 1 January 2020 and 31 December 2022. The Inquiry will establish the facts, identify the lessons that need to be learned, and make recommendations to Scottish Ministers.



#### What is Let's Be Heard?

The purpose of Let's Be Heard is to encourage people across Scotland to engage with the Inquiry by sharing their experiences of the pandemic. To be better prepared for the future, it is important we hear directly from people about what happened to them and understand the lessons they believe should be learned.

The information we gather through Let's Be Heard will help guide the Inquiry's investigations and inform its reports and recommendations. We need to reach as many people as possible across Scotland, which will help us identify any unequal impacts of the pandemic. This national phase of Let's Be Heard is open **until 20 December 2023**.

#### What questions are we asking?

Let's Be Heard is asking the public three core questions:

What were your experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic?

What were the impacts of these experiences on you or the people you know?

What lessons do you think should be learned from your experiences?

#### How can you share your experiences?

##### Online:

- Visit [lbh.covid19inquiry.scot](https://lbh.covid19inquiry.scot) and complete [our online form](#). You can also record your answer to each question as an audio file and upload it to the platform.
- Download an editable PDF form and return to us by email, or print and return by post.
- You can also help someone else to share their experiences, if they need support to participate. You can tell us you are doing this on the form.

##### Paper:

- Contact us to request a paper form with return envelope.
- Limited quantities of paper forms have also been sent to GP practices, pharmacies, public libraries, care homes and community centres across Scotland.

##### As part of a group:

- Hold [a group discussion](#) and take part as a group, family or organisation. We have an Engagement Guide to help you do this available online, or you can request a copy.

- We have resources available to help you promote Let's Be Heard and enable people to take part. You can use these resources in your newsletter or on your website.
- Members of the Let's Be Heard team would welcome being invited to attend any group discussions. If we are able to attend, we can do so to take note and hear people's experiences. We would also be happy to answer any questions relating to the Inquiry and Let's Be Heard but otherwise we will leave the facilitation to you - we understand you are best suited to engage meaningfully with your communities or members, and that people would be more comfortable sharing in that environment.

## **What different formats and languages are available?**

### **Children and Young People**

We have a page on our online platform [for children and young people](#). This includes an online form and other resources. You can also download the form or request paper copies.

### **Easy Read**

We have a page on our online platform in [Easy Read](#). This includes an online form and other resources. You can also download the form or request paper copies.

### **Large Print**

The form and other resources are available in large print. You can download these from our online platform or request paper copies.

### **Translations**

We have [translated the form and other resources](#) into Gaelic, simplified Chinese, Polish, standard Punjabi and Urdu. You can download these from our online platform or request paper copies.

If you would like information in a format or language which is not currently available, please do contact us.

## **If you have already collected people's experiences of the pandemic**

If you are part of a group or organisation, you may have already collected information about people's experiences of the pandemic in Scotland. You can [send us the report](#) of these experiences and we will include the findings in our work.

## **How you can find out more**

To find out more information about Let's Be Heard or to request paper copies of forms and resources:

Visit our online platform at: [lbh.covid19inquiry.scot](https://lbh.covid19inquiry.scot)

Email us at: [LetsBeHeard@covid19inquiry.scot](mailto:LetsBeHeard@covid19inquiry.scot)

Write to us at: Freepost SCOTTISH COVID-19 INQUIRY

Leave a voicemail and we will call you back: 0808 175 5555

## General winter advice, Scottish Water

Easy ways to protect your home and save water & energy this winter

Here in Scotland, we love talking about the weather...it's not just chilly - it's baltic! It's not just windy - it's blowing a hooley!



Now's the time to turn talk into action. Here's a few things you can do now to prepare and help reduce any impact extreme weather and colder temperatures might have on your home in the coming months. Spend some time now to help save energy, water and avoid the potential hassle & heartache later.

**Protect your pipes from colder temperatures** New or old, water pipes don't like the cold - whether they are indoors or outside, water pipes can freeze and burst when temperatures drop which can cause unwanted damage to homes. Make sure any water pipes are properly insulated - it's one of the simplest & cheapest things you can do to help protect your property.



**Do you know where your stop valve is?** It's important to know where the internal stop valve is in your property so that if you do experience a frozen or burst pipe you are able to turn the water supply off straight away. The stop valve is commonly located under a sink (in your kitchen or utility room), in a garage or in a location near to your hot water system. [Watch our video: How to find your stop valve](#)

**Don't forget the garden!** Although the gardening season is slowing down, there's still plenty you can do as you put your plants to bed for the next few months. Mulching beds and borders is a great way to lock moisture in the soil, and of course installing a water butt (or two!) will make the most of any rainy weather and help to save water for when we really need it in spring & summer. Water butts can also help to reduce the impact of sudden heavy rainfall which can cause puddles and damage to your outdoor space.



**Ensure 'winter warmers' don't block your drains.** Soups, stovies and stews are lovely 'winter warmers' at this time of year. But please don't pour any leftovers & fats, oil or grease (FOG) down the sink. As these cool, they congeal and cause blockages. After you finish cooking, if the leftover FOG can't be reused, let it cool and scrape it into the bin.

**Fix any drips & leaks** Any drips and leaks increase the risk of freezing, so check for any drips or leaks in your pipework and at any valves and taps and get these repaired as soon as you discover them. We support the WaterSafe scheme which can help you to find a registered plumber in your area visit: [www.needaplumber.org](http://www.needaplumber.org)

## Scam information – shared by a member following discussion at the Tea-break

### Six tips to spot a social media scam

- 1. Is too good to be true?** Scammers will often pretend to be from legitimate and trustworthy sources, offering an enticing incentive to click through to a 'too good to be true' deal. The first thing you should do is try doing a quick search for the promotion. If the company, organisation or brand is promoting a deal on social media, they are likely to also be promoting it on their official website.
- 2. Check their identity** Confirm the identity of the person or organisation, especially if they've contacted you out of the blue and are asking for money. Can you confirm who they really are? Look them up, check a few sources to confirm their identity. Use a tool like [TinEye](#) to trace the source of a profile picture. If it's a tempting investment offer, you can search the [Financial Services Register](#).
- 3. Inspect all URLs** Closely inspect any URLs you aren't sure about. Does the URL look suspicious? Does it match the URL of the company website? Sometimes enticing posts on social media link to a fake login page, and when you enter your email and password, you're actually giving those details to a scammer. Always check that the URL matches the social media website you're using if you're redirected to a login page after clicking a link in a post. Use a tool like [who.is](#) to look up domain name registrations, a recent registration is a good indication that it's a scam website.
- 4. Check your social media timeline** Are you seeing an unusually high volume of the same status being shared? This should ring alarm bells that it may be a scam, especially if the message is the same for more than a few people.
- 5. Don't give out personal or financial information** Online fraudsters often don't want you to hand over money straight away. Instead, they want you to provide your personal or financial information. If they have access to these details, they'll be able to use your identity fraudulently or can use your financial information to get access to your money via your bank or building society account. Remember that if you pay for anything via bank transfer, you have limited protections to be able to get your money back from a bank transfer scam.
- 6. Contact the company.** You could reach out to the organisation, company or brand to find out if the deal is genuine. Don't do this by clicking on any links in the possible scam. Instead, search for the company's real homepage and contact them via a social media account, email address or telephone number you find on there.

**Trading Standards warn householders about traders offering home energy product installation** Highland Council's Trading Standards and the Climate Change & Energy Team are joining forces to warn unsuspecting householders and Health Centres to be on their guard if they are approached by traders offering funding for the installation of home energy products.

This follows recent reports from two GP Practices in the Fort William area, who have been asked to assess patients for an offer of home energy products under Government funded schemes, implying they are approved by Highland Council when this is not the case.

Mark McGinty, Trading Standards Team Leader at Highland Council, said: "This is yet again another instance where the complex marketplace for the provision of such products has led to rogue traders seeking to take advantage. I'd urge any householder to check first the validity of any scheme, product, installer and payment before entering into a contract, whether it is free or not."

Highland Council recently published a Statement of Intent for Energy Company Obligation 4 Flex (ECO4 Flex) and Great British Insulation Scheme Flex (GBIS Flex). To be eligible for ECO4 Flex and GBIS Flex, you need to be homeowner or private rented tenant and the property needs to have a EPC SAP rating D-G. Further details can be found on the Council [website](#). Please also be aware Highland Council does not endorse 'door knocking' / 'cold calling'.

The website will include information on all live funding opportunities in the Highland region supported by Highland Council and installers approved to undertake works.

Isla MacMillan, Project Manager in the Climate Change & Energy team, Highland Council said: "We urge householders approached by installers offering energy efficiency measures under the ECO4 Flex or GBIS Flex schemes to check the approved installers list on the Council [website](#) or email [ECOflex.Highlands@highland.gov.uk](mailto:ECOflex.Highlands@highland.gov.uk). Installers approved by the Highland Council will not engage in 'door knocking' / 'cold calling' and will engage with households via social media channels or letters to households.

Mr McGinty added: "It is an offence for any trader to claim to operate under the approval of a scheme without the appropriate approval or authority. Highland Council Trading Standards will investigate complaints received and will take appropriate action should any offences be detected."

Further information on schemes to provide free home energy improvements can be found by contacting Home Energy Scotland for free on 0808 808 2282 callers will be given free and impartial advice.

If you wish to make a complaint because you feel you have been misled by a trader offering such works you should contact Trading Standards partner agency Advice Direct Scotland on telephone 0808 164 6000 or at [www.consumeradvice.scot](http://www.consumeradvice.scot)